

Two Coats of Paint

SOLO SHOWS

Sam Jablon's delicious confusion

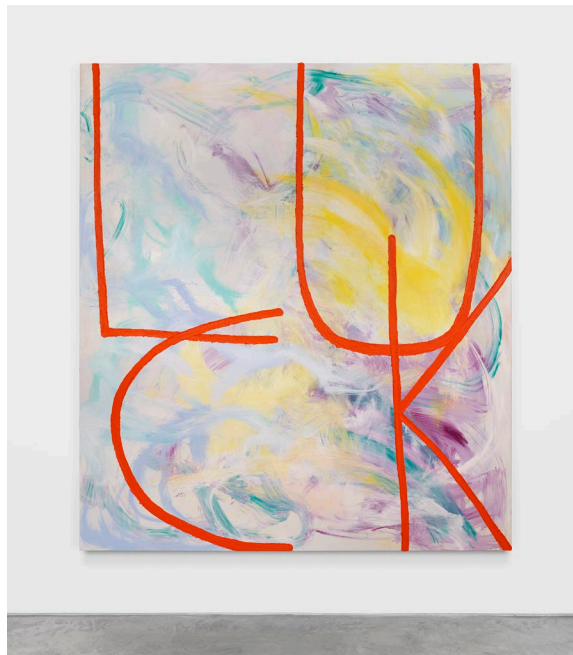
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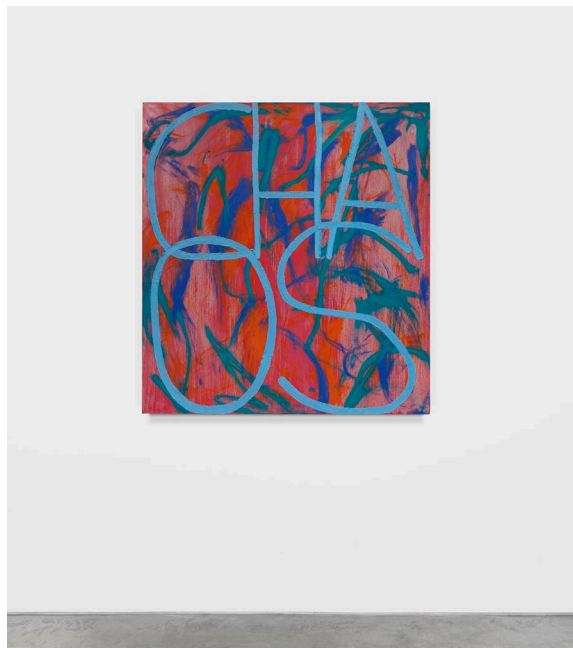
Sam Jablon, *Fuck*, 2026, oil on linen, 18 x 18 inches

Contributed by William Corwin / **The paintings of Sam Jablon** now on view at Morgan Presents produce delicious sentient confusion. The neural circuits devoted to looking at an image get crossed with those used to read text. We find the words, but, in Jablon's hands, we don't know what to do with them. *Fuck*, for example, a little 18-inch square painting in solid yellow with blue with black lettering, seems less about sex and more about the frustrated expletive. Or perhaps it's a cold command, broken down into two letters on top, F and U, and two letters below, C and K. We also fix on the shape of the letter as both a phoneme and an object, which Jablon gleefully emphasizes by layering the paint until the figure lightly floats. *Luck*, a large-scale piece, invites entertaining formalistic concerns: how much does changing one letter change the painting? Formally, the paintings are three-quarters the same, and an F is basically an inverted L. But the colors are very different – *Luck*'s background is mainly a diaphanous bluey-purple-white with only a light passage of yellow within the U, and the letters are red. This gets disorienting fast.

Jablon's letters never stray into the twee realm of glorified initials, and it takes a great deal of aesthetic rigor to make text paintings that are balanced between form and content. Unlike **Richard Prince**, **Christopher Wool**, or **Tracey Emin**, his works are not primarily conceptual exercises. But Jablon does keep egging us on. He is a poet, and the paintings emerge from a stream-of-consciousness poem he is constantly writing. He makes painterly snapshots, but there's poignant narrative in them. *Chaos*, with light blue letters that overlap against a background of dark blue streaks on vibrant vermillion, is vaguely chaotic, and the red suggests evil or hellishness. *Blessed* is white text atop a mottled Renaissance fresco blue, which makes it heavenly. *New Day*, much smaller but with the same colors, is similarly restful. *Oy Vey*, which incorporates a lighter version of *Blessed*'s color scheme, seems pained despite the placid palette. A miniature piece of the same title, with stark black text on solid white background, is far more declarative. Circling back to the disorienting power of these paintings, still another version of *Oy Vey*, light blue on top of a writhing orange and yellow background, instills in the Yiddish phrase a demonic energy that seems alien. Echoing this incongruity, the segments of the individual letters grow out of all proportion and crisscross each other, privileging looking over reading.



Sam Jablon, Luck, 2026, oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches



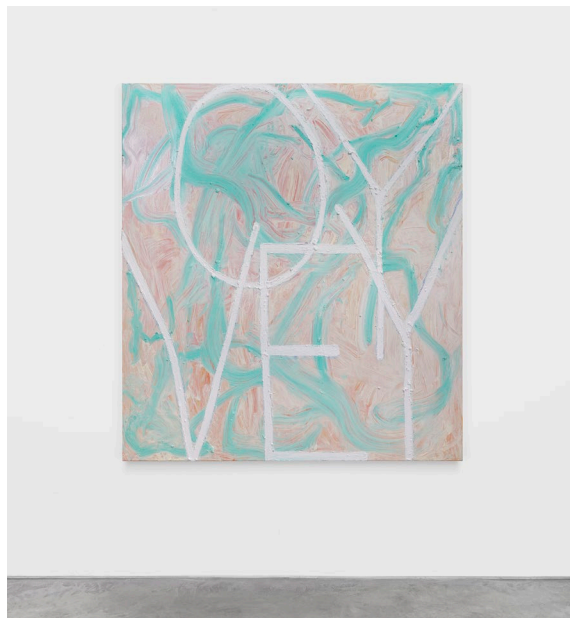
Sam Jablon, Chaos, 2026, oil on linen, 48 x 44 inches



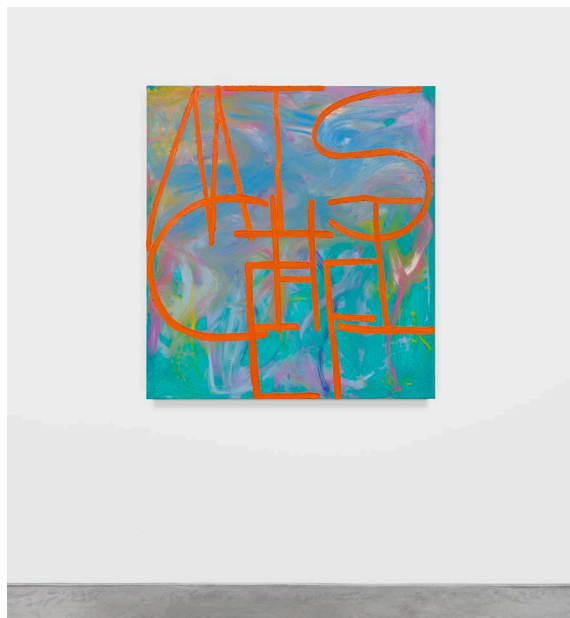
Sam Jablon, Blessed, 2026, oil on linen, 18 x 18 inches



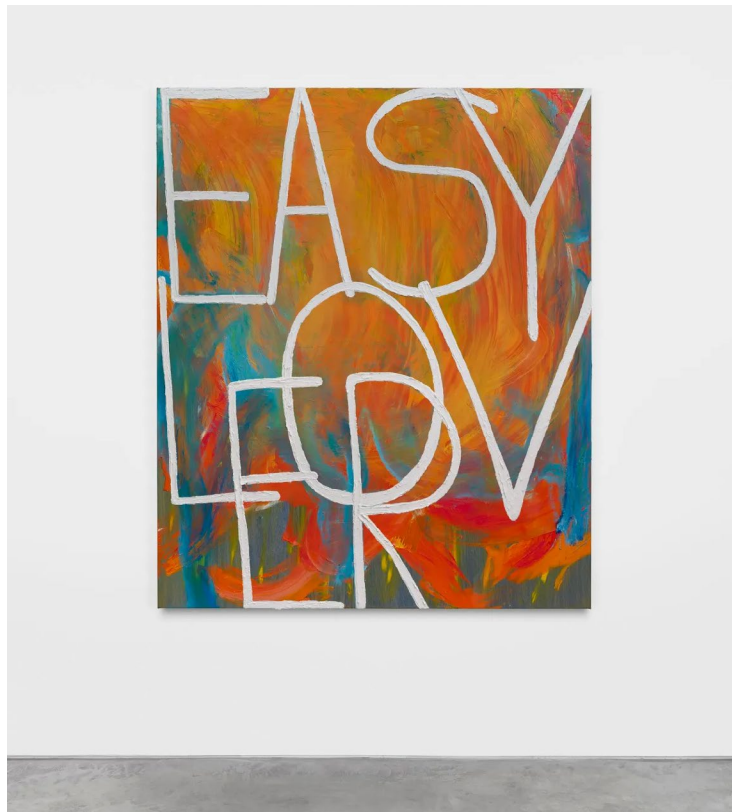
Sam Jablon, New Day, 2026, oil on linen, 10 x 8 inches



Sam Jablon, Oy Vey, 2026, oil on linen, 63 x 55 inches

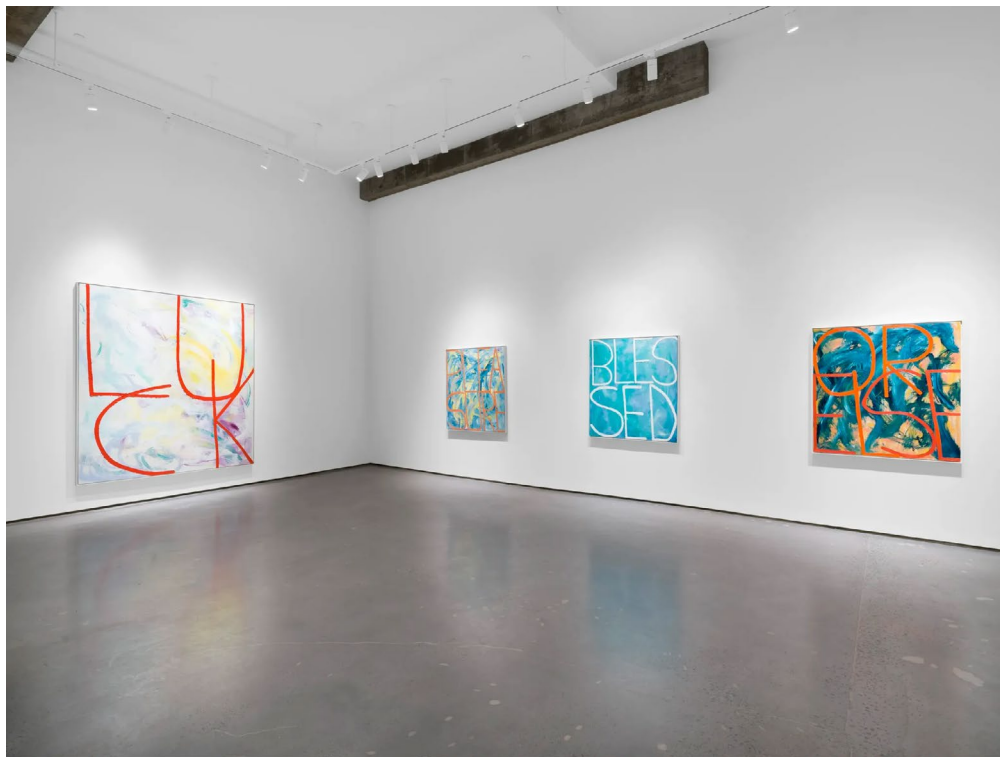


Sam Jablon, Mischief, 2026, oil on linen, 48 x 44 inches



Sam Jablon, Easy Lover, 2026, oil on linen, 60 x 50 inches

Except for *Mischief* and *Chaos* – the one hung over the other, perhaps signifying causation – the larger works appear singly on the walls of the gallery. Word by word, the painter's voice is clear, shifting from calm to anxious. The wall of small paintings is more choral. Although they are to be read as a group, more space might improve the experience. Jablon's care and restraint in presenting his words yield nuance. Like *Fuck*, *Easy Lover* playfully oscillates on that designation, but it also issues a warning. The direct white lettering on a tortured backdrop of cerulean blue, red, and orange tells the viewer to take a step back rather than pay a compliment.



Morgan Presents: Sam Jablon, Luck or Else, 2026, installation view

"Sam Jablon: Luck or Else," Morgan Presents, 537 West 27th Street, New York, NY. Through April 21, 2026.

About the author: William Corwin is a sculptor and writer based in New York.